



#314 HOA Homefront – Your Meetings Are Raucous? YOU Might Be the Problem

By Kelly G. Richardson, Esq. CCAL

Board meetings should be efficient and business-like events but can, unfortunately, become tumultuous and disorganized. Ineffective meetings frustrate directors, managers, and even the audience. The directors set the tone for the meeting, and there are ways in which the HOA board can contribute to (or prevent) a chaotic meeting environment.

Room configuration. How is the board seated? If the directors are all seated in a line facing the audience, a subtle message is conveyed ... the board is talking to the audience. It is not surprising that in such a seating configuration the audience believes it is their right to talk to the board in return. If the board sits more in a semi-circle, the directors can face each other, while the audience is able to listen to the board deliberate.

Talking to the audience. Some directors cannot resist “playing to the crowd” and speaking to the audience. This completely disrespects the other directors and can lead to raucous response from the audience. Directors should never grandstand to the audience and should confine their remarks to their board colleagues.

No rules. Very few associations have meeting conduct rules. Such rules can prohibit certain intolerable behaviors, such as shouting, physical intimidation, and profanity or hate speech. All members should be able to feel safe as they attend meetings. Should anyone disrupt the meeting, rules would empower the board to impose discipline. Meeting rules can also contain open forum guidelines, disciplinary hearing procedures, and other helpful information explaining the various meeting procedures.

Undisciplined deliberation. A disciplined board stays on the agenda item at hand and avoids straying into other side issues. Rambling board deliberations will frustrate both directors and audience. All directors should help in reminding their board colleagues when the group goes off the topical rails – it’s not only the chair’s job.

Interfering with open forum. Open forum is a critically important event because it is the one time in the meeting when association members speak, and the board just listens. Directors should not interject or respond during open forum remarks. If the directors interrupt a member’s open forum remarks, it adds a conversational element into the meeting – but this is not a conversation, it is a board meeting. Furthermore, if directors are unable to quietly listen to open forum remarks, why is it fair to demand that the audience quietly listen to the board deliberations?



Board decorum deficit. Good meeting behavior begins with a respectful and calm chair and a mature group of directors. If the board is disorderly, it is unreasonable to expect the audience to be otherwise.

Letting it happen. A loudmouth bully only takes over meetings when nobody stops them. A common response to meeting disruption is to adjourn, but that means the bully won. Instead, take a short recess, allowing the disruptor to choose between calming or leaving.

Disrespectful disagreements. One sad hallmark of our present culture is the unwillingness to express disagreement respectfully. We shake our heads at some of the antics and venom spewing from both sides of the political aisle – but miss that sometimes our neighbors are treating each other the same way.

Businesslike HOA meetings do not just happen. They result from disciplined and intentional conduct, building a positive and respectful HOA meeting culture.

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